

Zafer Şenocak

Fore-Names

Translated by Lauren Beck

It was one of my grandfather's droll ideas to give me the name "Great Victory." Now, not only I but everyone who pronounces my name has waited for the past half century, that is as long as I have been in the world, for the great victory. It fails to materialize because we do not wage wars anymore. My grandfather, I cannot remember him since he died shortly after my birth, is said to have been a smart, well-traveled man. He probably suspected that in future lifetimes there would be no more victories and gave me this name not without some wistfulness. Or he was an incorrigible man who simply would not consider adapting to the times. No one gives that any thought today. No one can even imagine what a war means. In the history books, it always has something to do with expanding the size of our empire. An apple-sized country becomes first an orange, then a melon, after that formless, finally its borders reach all the way to the corners of the history book. Neighbors find no more room on the same page. That was our empire. And like every bloated thing, at some point it burst. We now live on one of its shreds and still fight amongst ourselves about what we should call this shred. I just call it "Shred." But a lot of people think this does not suit my name. "Great Victory" on a shred. One could also call this shred a shroud, for there is a particularly large number of corpses to be found here, subterraneously. At some point, cemeteries and gravestones were no longer laid out. At some point, one grew weary of the wars. This weariness was greater than the longing for victories.

So, according to my name, I am an outsider in this land. I remind the people of what they surrendered. Still, they are not unfriendly to me. For they certainly do not want to wage any wars. But then what do they do the entire day long? Do they not feel this itching all over their bodies? The burning under the soles of their feet? Is it not maybe time again to go to battle? At the very least, an encampment could be pitched, somewhere at the border. The point of borders, after all, is to let the good through and to stop the bad. We, however, let everyone through. We did not abolish only war but also the borders. Some probably thought that would be a cunning gambit to turn the shred into a great empire again. Yet the empire's border is no longer a border, either, after all. Someone is waging war against us. It is always war, we just hardly notice it, since we neither have an

empire nor know borders, since we have come to terms with the fact that our borders are ignored and “Great Victory” is just a forename.

Someone calls for me and I come. I am an obedient soldier. Believe me, I only need a war to prove it. I need a war, a chance to prove myself.